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ABSTRACT

This paper explores possible answers to the question of why more social science research is not applied to the solution of current problems. A series of interviews in several cities with 45 people, including members of city government and university administrators and faculty, provided the data for this study. In particular, the work of the Urban Observatory Program in selected cities was observed. The program's goals are to promote and coordinate urban research by universities which will relate to urban problems and to make the results of this research available to local governments. Some of the significant obstacles to the implementation of social science research carried out by universities in the solution of urban problems are (1) the differences in organization, philosophy, and methodology between universities and the city governments which are the subjects of the research; (2) the theoretical nature of some types of research; (3) the poor methodology used for some research; and (4) apathy and bureaucratic red tape on the part of the city governments and universities. Suggested methods to insure better implementation of research projects include a minimum five-year tenure for university programs and better communication between participants in cooperative projects. (Author/MK)

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WHY SO MUCH SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH IS NOT IMPLEMENTED

A paper presented at the Annual Meeting

Rural Sociology Section

Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists

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Why Much Social Science Research is Not Implemented

In recent years thousands of dollars have been spent in social science related research. Some of the findings of this research have been implemented but a great many of them have not been carried out. This paper seeks to discover reasons why some social science research is not implemented. In days of inflation and shrinking budgets it is important that this topic be explored. When studies that have not been implemented line the shelves of government officials who have authorized money for them, these officials are hesitant to provide more money for similar studies. Accountability means that money and time spent on studies be more adequately used. Appropriate findings and/or recommendations should be given serious consideration by those in a position to put them into effect.

A survey of the literature reveals that little time has been spent in discovering and analyzing the reasons for this lack of implementation. Mr. William C. Pendleton is a program officer in the office of Urban and Metropolitan Development at the Ford Foundation. He suggested in 1974 that preliminary evaluation of a multimillion-dollar investment of the Foundation in programs to help universities become involved in urban problems through research has not produced any startling breakthroughs. These programs had not helped in our understanding of how cities operate, what makes them grow or wither, what produces conflict or harmony, and what the keys are to successful government, citizen participation, and efficient delivery of services. It would seem that the research efforts stimulated by this vast amount of money has produced only mole hills when mountains

might have been expected. The Ford Foundation has turned its efforts to more productive areas of investment partly as a result of this dismal failure.

A report was prepared for the National Institute of Mental Health in 1969 by the Human Interaction Research Institute in Los Angeles, California investigating research projects sponsored by the Institute. It suggested that little effort or systematic study is being carried on to fulfill the expectation that the new knowledge, insights and techniques being produced will be applied in action for the benefit of people or will be cross-validated through further demonstration and evaluation.

Even though one can cite many instances in which research is implemented the question still remains, "Why is not more social science research implemented?" To explore the possible answers to this question the writer studied the work of the Urban Observatory Program in several cities and observed the work in several other cities in which such a program has not been established. During May and June of 1975 he visited the following cities in which the Urban Observatory Program has been established: Denver, Colorado; Kansas City, Missouri; Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Nashville, Tennessee. Cities visited that did not have this program were: Pueblo, Colorado; Amarillo, Texas; Dallas, Texas; Corpus Christie, Texas and Huntington, West Virginia.

The Urban Observatory Program was established in 1969 by the National League of Cities in cooperation with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Office of Education of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The three basic objectives give a clue concerning the unique aspects of this program. 1. To facilitate making available, to local governments, university resources useful for understanding and solving particular urban and metropolitan problems.

2. To advance a coordinated program of continuing urban research, grounded in practical experience and application, relevant to urban management, human resources, and urban environmental and developmental problems, to a number of different areas and communities.
3. To advance university capabilities to relate research and training activities more effectively to urban concerns and the conditions of urban living.

(For a more detailed analysis of the Urban Observatory Program see "Urban Research and Urban Policy-Making, an Observatory Perspective" by F. William Heiss. Bureau of Governmental Research and Service, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, 1974).

The data and information gathered for this paper was collected through a series of interviews in the cities visited. A variety of persons were interviewed including staff and Board members of the Urban Observatory Programs, city council members, city staff members selected from those working with the University Observatory Program and members of University administrations and faculties who had worked with the University Observatory Programs. To secure the information, a total of forty-five persons were interviewed. Before leaving on the trip a visit with Mr. Lawrence Williams of the National League of Cities staff gave the writer valuable information about the total Urban Observatory Program and some insights into the operation of the several programs to be visited. Since the purpose of the study was to assess the experience of the various University Observatory programs there was no attempt to gather statistical data about each program. In the limited space available only two things will be attempted. First, the description of problems faced

which make implementation difficult. Second, suggestions for avoiding and/or solving these problems growing out of the experiences of those participating in the various University Observatory programs.

The problems encountered in a program designed to promote cooperative research between city officials and university staff members were many and varied. Fortunately some possible solutions to these problems have been found. Some of the more significant problems and solutions are as follows.

1. Two different systems of organization, philosophy and methodology are involved. These differences often create problems ir research and implementation which have been difficult to resolve.

   a. Universities basically operate on either the quarter or the semester time schedule. Holidays do not coincide with those of the city. Both faculty and students are locked into this rather rigid way of life. For faculty members to have time for research activities a great deal of advanced notice is necessary on most campuses, at least a semester or quarter. To have time off the faculty member needs to produce enough outside money which can be put into the university budget to hire a substitute teacher. Many universities place a limit on the number and kinds of activities a faculty member can engage in while teaching a full load. Graduate students need a similar amount of lead time as they plan their work.

      The city officials often need more flexibility with time and money than the university system allows under normal circumstances. Problems arise that need immediate attention, even in a well organized planning department of a city. Next semester may be too late.

   b. To secure the necessary flexibility of time and money several universities have established a special Institute or Center. It is able to represent the university and has provisions for helping make

available meeded personnel for cooperative research projects. These Institutes or Centers have a great variety in size and budget, from one part time person to twenty-two staff members. Budgets vary from $5,000.00 to over $1,000,000.00. Through these administrative agencies the university can negotiate contracts, make long range plans, discover needed personnel and act as an interpreter between the two systems represented by the university and the city.

The failure to recognize the different needs, unique characteristics and ways of working of these two systems has created frustration, suspicion and failure in the attempt to do cooperative research.

2. The type of research that is being done is related to the particular problems of implementation.

a. Theoretical Studies

In this research no implementable findings or recommendations are always produced. The purpose of such studies may be to test hypotheses, assemble information about particular topics or to determine whether there is need for futher research which might lead to suggestions for change or action.

b. General Background Studies

Often it is important to gather and interpret information from a wide variety of sources for the purpose of understanding particular and specific problems. Such studies would include those which would describe the historical background of a city or problem within a city, assembling of information to more precisely describe an issue, or a description of the physical layout of a city.

c. Specific Problem Analysis

Implicit in this kind of research is the need for specific recommendations for action which will result in change or changes.

Usually the findings imply a variety of ways of adjusting societal structures and individual or group attitudes.

d. Studies designed to experiment with and evaluate methods of solving particular problems.

These studies are usually highly specific and designed to produce concrete findings and recommendations. Alternative solutions are often suggested with the positive and negative consequences of each alternative.

Confusion is often caused by not recognizing or using the simple classification of research suggested above. Studies vary greatly in their purposes, methodology and end products. Therefore, expectations may or may not be realistic or achieved.

3. Research may be ill-conceived, using poor methodology with no agreement upon the desired product.

In one instance the city officials went to the university personnel and asked them to do a research job. The contract was signed with a minimum of consultation. The university people did the research with no further consultation. A year later they returned with what they thought was the desired report only to find that the city officials were highly critical, disappointed and angry.

In another situation there was continual conversation and dialogue between the city officials and the university personnel. Potential problems were identified and solved before the problems became critical. Honest criticism was possible in these creative discussions because mutual trust and understanding had been developed by both groups. The project had become "our" project and not "your" project. Continual consultation between the cooperating parties helps produce well conceived

projects and projects with adequate methodology which is understood and sharpened through critical discussions. The end-product is one that is understood and agreed to by city officials. They are then in a mood and position to push for its implementation. Because of the manner in which the study was produced many studies sit idle on municipal book shelves. Implementation will not take place without acceptance and understanding by city officials.

4. Some suggestions and recommendations are not implemented because:

a. They cost too much money.

In these days of inflation and shrinking city budgets it is wise to have a series of recommendations costing varying amounts. Hopefully, one will be possible to carry out within the budget of the city.

b. The recommendations that come out of the hallowed halls and ivory towers are opposed by a variety of vested interests.

In one instance this possibility was anticipated and the wording and explanation of the recommendations did much to make them acceptable. Often no amount of careful working will obviate this difficulty.

c. The recommendations are in direct opposition to the concerns of the power structure of the city. Lack of implementation may result but the recommendations may produce discussion which often is helpful.

d. No one is concerned.

Implementation usually is hard and costly work. Unless some one pushes, the easiest thing is for the study to be shelved and forgotten. When this happens, it is more difficult to secure support for further studies from city officials.

e. The persons responsible have no ideas concerning how the suggestions and recommendations can be implemented. "It sounds great and reads

well, but what do I do with it? How can it be translated into city ordinances?" These were the questions of a busy, perceptive city councilman who took a great deal of time to read the studies produced by his Urban Observatory program. "We need to have some one who can translate these findings and recommendations into language and ideas that we can use in the busy life that we live. We have a part-time job and neither the competence nor the time to do the necessary work of translation."

THIS NOTE WAS SOUNDED IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS. THE PROBLEM OF LACK OF UTILIZATION IS IN GREAT PART A PROBLEM OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE TWO SYSTEMS REPRESENTED BY THE CITY AND THE UNIVERSITY.

We need to develop multidisciplinary specialists who can perform this service of interpretation if we are to recieve more practical use from the research dollar.

5. All of the time, money and effort is spent on producing the research with none left for implementation.

"We must plan for implementation as a part of the total research job", was a frequent comment by other city and university people. Implementation is almost an afterthought. No one is assigned the responsibility to follow through and therefore it falls between offices with nothing done. Busy people who are already overburdened rarely have the time, energy or authority to pick up on the implementation of a research project. When it has been completed--delivered and paid for--it is often forgotten. Lack of implementation is often by default and not by design.

6. Timing is crucial in the implementation of research. In rapidly changing times the problem that has given rise to the project has either become obsolete or has been forgotten. The moods of the moment pass quickly.

Long term projects find it difficult to maintain interest and concern. If you don't strike while the iron is hot--forget it. This seems to be the attitude often found. This, of course varies with the nature of the project and how it is interpreted.

7. The bureaucratic red tape of both the city and the university create problems for implementation. Some of these arise because of the difficulty to place authority and responsibility. More often than not these are not placed in the same person or office. Limited budgets are problems. Public relations in dealing with controversial topics often becomes a problem. (No one wants to claim the baby--to say nothing of implementing its recommendations. University people retreat to the ivory towers and city people busy themselves in getting reelected.) Frustrations of all kinds were shared growing out of unnecessary paper work, lack of recognition of research by university administrators, problems arising from increasing publication costs, doing research within the over-load concept rather than a part of one's job, etc.
8. The frequent changes in personnel in both the university and the city staff is a very common problem.

Relationships and trust that are developing often disappear as people change positions. Verbal agreements of cooperation leave with the people involved. Phasing out of departments and program emphases often leave the research out in the cold. Changing or modifying institutional goals may change the ability of a university to respond to requests. A new president in a small university often means new concerns and budgetary arrangements. A new mayor or members of a city council often means a shift away from research and its implementation. It is strange how a few key people leaving can completely change the atmosphere, willingness and ability to do cooperative research and carry out its findings.

9. The target group of the study is not interested in being helped.

A large number of citizen involvment studies have been carried out in connection with the Urban Observatory Program. In some instanc it has been very difficult to get the citizens involved in situations that have been analyzed. For some years, research projects have tried to discover the key ingredients which effect citizen participation. Progress has been made in limited areas but public apathy has proven to be a very difficult subject to analyze. Its causes are many and varied and the solutions seem to be illusive. Discussions with severa authors of these studies revealed that while some progress has been made, few sure-fire panaceas have been discovered. It seems to be muc easier to isolate causes for non-involvment than to recommend solution Studies of low income persons and their lack of participation have bee particularly difficult. "They just don't seem to want to change and to participate," is a frequent comment.

10. Unrealistic expectation on the part of both university and city offici has proven to be a handicap in the implementation of much social scien research.

Some city officials have had little background in working with research findings. They tend to expect a job to be completed quickly, easily and cheaply. Unrealistic time involvement concepts lead to exp ations that cannot be fullfilled. Often it is expected that students do the work with little or no compensation by getting class credit for work done. Part-time commitments are always difficult to control. The problem of conducting a valid study frequently is misunderstood by city officials.

Some problems have been identified which are related to non-imp ementation of research of the socia! sciences. In previous comments some of the solutions that have been discovered are suggested. During the interviews helpful suggestions were given in response to the question "What could be done to insure more and better implementation of research projects?" Many of the answers coincide with suggestions made by Mr. William C. Pendleton in a recent talk "University/City Relations Revisited" and in the study prepared by the Human Interaction Research Institute mentioned earlier in the paper. Drawing from these three sources in addition to the writer's experience in the field the following positive suggestions are offered. Possibly they will be helpful, especially those in smaller universities and colleges who would like to work with their colleagues downtown even without a formalized program such as the University Observatory Program. The fact that these suggestions may seem obvious to many who are already experienced research does not mean that they are not important. Often the obvious is the last thing to be done. Most of these suggestions apply to both university and city personnel.

1. A focus for the concern for research needs to be established with a minimum provision for personnel and budget.
2. A five year tenure of the research program, at least, is important. Without some stability of program it is difficult to develop positive experience and an output that will prove useful and implementable.
3. The participants in a cooperative project should take time to get acquainted with each other a professionals and as human beings. This should occur in formal and informal settings. As the project progresses and as differences and misunderstandings occur the time spent becomes important. Frequent and regular consultations during the project pay off in many ways

to insure that the recommendations are implementable

4. Recognize and allow for the differences in the two systems. Often these differences can be reconciled and overcome. At least they should be understood and faced frankly.
5. Realize that probably not all of the needed research projects can best be done by university personnel. Often an outside consulting firm has a more flexible time schedule and the technical competence that is not available at a university. The city officials should carefully consider their alternatives.
6. Implementation should be considered as an important part of the total research project. Provision should be made for it in personnel and the budget.
7. One of the frequent problems causing lack of understanding of the meaning and implications of research projects is technical terminology. The study should be written as far a possible in non-technical language. What is appropriate for a professional journal is not appropriate for the average city council.
8. The necessary role of interpretation of the study must be given serious consideration. The writer found a number of persons on the staff of cities who had formerly been on the staff of a university and had an understanding of the problems of communication between the two groups. They were most helpful in interpreting the different needs, problems, concepts and ways of working found among city and university people.
9. University people (both professors and students) cannot be expected to work for nothing. There is wide disagreement on what constitutes appropriate charges. Overhead demanded by universities often present a real problem to cities with limited budgets.

10. The various sterotypes and images of "university" people and "politicians" have to be overcome if creative work is to be done and implemented. Not all university people are "egg heads" and not all politicians and civic servants have their"hand in the till." People in government often view the academic as a miracle worker. These and the many other erroneous concepts have helped prevent the implementation of much valuable research.
11. It is important to recognize that academics seek answers that are true and general; city officials need answers that are specific and will work. University people get recognition through publications while city leaders are judged on what they do.
12. Involvement is a key to implementation. While it takes time, it is important to keep those who will have the responsibility for implementation aware of the research as it is in progress. Allow them to have input along the way. They may raise good questions that will be helpful and come to think of the project as their own. They will understand the findings and desire to implement them. The suggestions of these people should be considered seriously, and if rejected, the reasons for the rejection should be given.
13. Systematic communication about the progress of the project keeps key persons informed, allows them to have participation and keeps their interest. Administrators tend to be turned off if they only hear of the research project when it is in some kind of trouble.
14. The director should give full time to the work except for small projects.
15. A time schedule, if followed, forces the researcher to do the data gathering and then proceed with analysis and interpretation. Several projects spent too much time on the data gathering stage.
16. The type of packaging and dissemination of the final report has a great

deal to do with its utilization. A variety of methods and approaches helps insure proper utilization, i.e. printed reports, use of visual aids, workshops dealing with the subjects, having pratitioners help in suggesting recommendations.

The sources used in the preparation of this paper were many and varied. The interviews conducted provided the notes for most of the material. A review of several books on research methodology confirmed many of the ideas but were not particularly helpful in suggesting new ideas. Discussing the problems with colleagues gave added insights. Descriptions of the various Urban Observatory Programs, mostly mimeographed form, were useful. The following publications were the most pertinent and helpful:

1. Glaser, E.M., and Taylor, S.H. "Factors Influencing the Success of Applied Research". Human Interaction Research Institute Los Angeles, California. 1969.

2 2. Heiss, F.W., "Urban Research and Urban Policy-Making--An Urban Observatory Perspective". Bureau of Governmental Research and Service, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, 1974.

3. Pendleton, W.C., "Urban Studies and the University--The Ford Foundation Experience". A Ford Foundation Reprint, New York, 1974.

4. Pendleton, W.C., "University/City Relations Revisited". A Ford Foundation Reprint, New York, 1975.

5. Williams, Lawrence A., "The Urban Observatory Program--a HUD-Funded City-University Experiment that Works." National League of Cities, Washington, D.C. 1974.

There is a growing literature describing how sociologists are becoming involved in the implementation of their insights and research. One of the better recent books is--Putting Sociology to Work by Arthur B. Shostak. David McKay Company, Inc., New York. 1974